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TESTIMONY ON MICHIGAN H.B. 5670
Presented by Vicki Deisner, State Legislative Director, Midwest Region
Before the Michigan House Criminal Justice Committee
Tuesday, September 20, 2016

Chairman Heise, Majority Vice Chair Webber, Minority Vice-Chair Guerra and distinguished members of the House Criminal Justice Committee, I am Vicki Deisner, State Legislative Director for the Midwest Region of the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). The ASPCA, founded in 1866, is the first humane organization established in the Americas and serves as the nation's leading voice for animal welfare. The ASPCA's mission is to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States. As part of our national effort to assist local anti-cruelty efforts on the ground the ASPCA provides grants to local communities. In fact, over the last several years we have awarded over \$600,000 to communities throughout Michigan. On behalf of our approximately 2.5 million members and supporters, including over 75,000 Michigan citizens, we **respectfully urge the House Criminal Justice Committee to vote YES on H.B. 5670, which would make it a misdemeanor to be cruel to a companion animal in front of a minor, or force a child to participate in such cruelty.**

It is now known that traumatic experiences, such as witnessing animal abuse, can cause severe and long-lasting damage to a child, leading to the growth of antisocial behaviors, poor social and cognitive competence, and health problems. Studies also demonstrate that youth who have multiple exposures to violence or victimization are at higher risk for mental health problems, behavioral problems, substance abuse, and delinquent behaviors that can lead to their later involvement with the juvenile justice system. Another study found that when a child witnessed acts of animal cruelty, that child is more than eight times more likely to become a perpetrator of violence.

Arkansas, Oregon and Illinois, as well as Puerto Rico have taken measures to make it a crime for those who force children to be parties to the abuse of animals. Such laws recognize the harm children suffer when exposed to animal abuse. Given the damage to a child's physical and emotional well-being from seeing violence inflicted on the family pet – who probably serves as the friend, confidant, and source of emotional support for the child, those who perpetrate such an act of violence should be charged with criminal penalties.

For all of the aforementioned reasons, the ASPCA respectfully urges the House Criminal Justice Committee to support H.B. 5670.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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